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PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN PLANT NAMES

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Pennsylvania German Plant Names

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The following is a short list of Pennsylvania German popular names of some of the common wild and cultivated plants collected in Lebanon and Lancaster counties. This has been prepared because of the intrinsic interest it may have to botanists, and also for the purpose of recording and communicating names that may have important suggestions for folklorists. This list of well-authenticated Pennsylvania German names has been compiled from the notes of the late Frederick Knopf of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, which he collected during his study of the local flora, extending over a period of twenty years. He collected more than 1,200 species of herbs, grasses, and woody plants which are now deposited in the Herbaria of Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa., and of the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, Mo.

This collection of Pennsylvania German names of plants has been made with a great deal of care for this particular locality. It is far from being complete, however, and those who are interested enough to continue this work will have before them a most fascinating, but also a very intricate study. It is one that should receive attention of the readers, who should be urged to cooperate with some one willing to give it the attention it deserves. This has been done with the popular English names of most of the flowering plants and ferns in England, and is now being successfully carried on in this country, particularly with the useful plants.

Every plant is supposed to have a correct botanical name, but when it comes to the popular or trade names, there are only a few plants that have not been rechristened again and again until, for our common plants at least, there is an endless confusion of popular names. Each locality has names

for some plants that are entirely different from those used elsewhere. In this list but one Pennsylvania German name is given for a particular species, which is, in all cases, the one name most commonly used. In general, a popular name should be considered to belong properly to a particular species and should be entirely restricted to one species. This is, however, seldom the case with the Pennsylvania German names, the different species of certain genera being seldom distinguished, unless there are present certain very obvious characters that call for a distinction. Such characters are usually those of color, odor, taste, or, frequently, size. For instance, all species of violets are simply called "Veilchen." The fact that *Viola pedata* L. has a deeply-parted leaf and *Viola palmata* L. has merely a crenate-dentate leaf does not call for a distinct name in the Pennsylvania German botanical vocabulary. The yellow-colored flower of *Viola pubescens* L., however, immediately suggests a distinction, and it is, therefore, called "Gelbe Veilchen." Similar cases could be cited in which different names have been suggested by a characteristic odor, taste, or size, rather than by characters that are more apt to be regarded as trustworthy by trained botanists in distinguishing between species of a genus. For instance, *Verbascum blattaria*, L., which commonly has white flowers, sometimes develops bright yellow flowers, and on the strength of this character alone the plants are separated and are called "weise" and "gelbe Puttern" respectively, as if there were two distinct species.

It is interesting to notice that the names of parts of plants enter into the composition of Pennsylvania German plant names. **Kraut**, **wurzel**, and **blume** are among the most common.

In general, **kraut** (Eng. weed or herb) indicates a common, useless plant growing luxuriantly in places where it is a source of great annoyance, as Schellkraut (Celandine), Katzenkraut (Catnip), Milchkraut (Milkweed), and Eisenkraut (Ironweed). On the other hand **wurzel** (Eng. root) generally seems to carry with it the idea of usefulness as a medicine or source of food, as in the case of Olantswurzel (Elecampane), Goldwurzel (Gold thread), Christwurzel (Black hellebore), Haaselwurzel (Wild ginger), and Schwartswurzel (Common Comfrey) all of which are mentioned in the pharmacopoeia as plants

that are now or formerly were considered to possess medicinal virtues. **Blume** (Eng. flower) has been generally used to designate plants of large size or having unusually large or attractive flowers. This is shown in the case of Sonnenblume (sunflower) and Glockenblume (Wild columbine).

The word **hund** (Eng. dog) is found in constant use to qualify the name of a plant that is very common, and is thus distinguished from another kind less familiar, or which it somewhat resembles, as is shown in the case of Hundsblume (Butter-and-eggs).

LIST OF PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN NAMES OF PLANTS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING
ENGLISH AND BOTANICAL NAMES

Penna. German	English	Botanical
	Grammeae	
Kitzal-grass	Witch-grass	<i>Panicum capillare</i> L.
	Araceae	
Gauls-zwievel	Jack-in-the-Pulpit	<i>Arisaema triphyllum</i> Mart.
	Liliaceae	
Schnitt-lauch	Chives	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i> , not L.
Wilder knoblauch	Field garlic	<i>Allium vineale</i> L.
Weinbottles	Grape-hyacinth	<i>Muscari botryoides</i> Mill.
	Urticaceae	
Hopfen	Hop	<i>Humulus lupulus</i> L.
Bren-nessel	Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.
	Aristolochiaceae	
Haaselwurzel	Wild ginger	<i>Asarum canadense</i> L.
Schlangenwurzel	Virginia snake-root	<i>Aristolochia serpentaria</i> L.
	Polygonaceae	
Wegtreter	Doorweed	<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> L.
Silber-grass	Knot-grass	<i>Polygonum erectum</i> L.
Floekraut	Goose-grass	<i>Polygonum pennsylvanicum</i> L.
Buchweizen	Buckwheat	<i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i> Gaertn
Halber-gaul	Curled dock	<i>Rumex crispus</i> L.
Sauerampel	Sheep-sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i> L.
	Chenopodiaceae	
Wurmkraut	Wormseed	<i>Chenopodium anthelminticum</i> L.
Melde	Orache	<i>Atriplex hortense</i> L.
	Amaranthaceae	
Hahnenkamm	Red amaranth	<i>Amaranthus paniculatus</i> L.
	Phytolaccaceae	
Poke	Pokeweed	<i>Phytolacca decandra</i> L.
	Caryophyllaceae	
Ratten	Corn-cockle	<i>Lychnis githago</i> L.

Penna. German	English	Botanical
	Ranunculaceae	
Christwurz	Christmas rose	Helleborus niger L.
Goldwurz	Three-leaved goldthread	Coptis trifolia (L.) Salisb.
Wind roeschen	Virginian anemone	Anemone virginiana L.
Anemone	Rue-anemone	Anemonella thalictroides L.
Hahnenfuss	Small flowering crowfoot	Ranunculus abortivus L.
Raute	Early meadow rue	Thalictrum dioicum L.
Glockenblume	Wild-columbine	Aquilegia canadensis L.
	Berberidaceae	
Maiapfel	Mandrake	Podophyllum peltatum L.
	Papaveraceae	
Blutwurz	Bloodroot	Sanguinaria canadensis L.
Schellkraut	Celandine	Chelidonium majus L.
	Cruciferae	
Kresse	True water-cress	Nasturtium officinale (L.) Rusby.
Mustard	Hedge-mustard	Sisymbrium officinale L.
Dotter	False-flax	Camelina sativa (L.) Crantz.
	Rosaceae	
Wilde Rose	Wild rose	Rosa licida L.
	Leguminosae	
Wilde Erpeln	Strawberry	Fragaria virginiana L.
5-Fingerkraut	Cinquefoil	Potentilla norvegica L.
Schampflanze	Wild sensitive-plant	Cassia nictitans L.
Haasenkleee	Rabbit-foot	Trifolium arvense L.
	Geraniaceae	
Haasenkleee	Violet wood-sorrel	Oxalis violacea L.
	Malvaceae	
Buttermoedel	Velvet leaf	Abutilon abutilon (L.) Rusby
Kaespapple	Common mallow	Malva rotundifolia L.
	Violaceae	
Veilchen	Bird's-foot violet	Viola pedata L.
Gelbe veilchen	Yellow violet	Viola pubescens L.
	Umbelliferae	
Fennel	Fennel	Foeniculum officinale Adans.
Pimpinelle	Yellow pimpinell	Pimpinella integerrima L.
Pastinake	Parsnip	Pastinaca sativa L.
Gelbe Rueben	Carrots (wild)	Daucus carota L.
	Ericaceae	
Rumatiskraut	Spotted wintergreen	Chimaphila maculata Pursh.
Bux	Mountain-laurel	Kalmia latifolia L.
Brustthee	Creeping wintergreen	Gaultheria procumbens L.
Wuthkraut	Common pimpinell	Anagallis arvensis L.
Wintergruen	Prince's-pine	Chimaphila umbellata Pursh.
	Asclepiadaceae	
Milchkraut	Pleurisy-root	Asclepias tuberosa L.
Milchkraut	Milkweed	Asclepias obtusifolia L.
	Convolvulaceae	
Winde	Bindweed	Convolvulus repens L.
	Borraginaceae	
Schwartzwurz	Com. Comfrey	Symphytum officinale L.
Schafflaue	Com. Hound's-tongue	Cynoglossum officinale L.
	Labiatae	
Gamander	Amer. Germander	Teucrium canadense L.
Katzenkraut	Catnip	Nepeta cataria L.

Penna. German

English

Botanical

Salvei
Mutterkraut
Balsam
Eisop
Wohlgemuth
Quandel

Sage
Oswego-tea
Horsemint
Hyssop
Wild marjoram
Creeping thyme

Salvia officinale L.
Monarda didyma L.
Monarda fistulosa L.
Hyssopus officinalis L.
Origanum vulgare L.
Thymus serpyllum L.

Solanaceae

Judenkirsche
Nachtschatten
Stechkraut

Ground-cherry
Black nightshade
Jamestown-weed

Physalis philadelphica L.
Solanum nigrum L.
Datura stramonium L.

Plantaginaceae

Sowohren blaetter

Com. Plantain

Plantago major L.

Rubiaceae

Fasanten-beeren

Partridge-berry

Mitchella repens L.

Campanulaceae

Glockenblume
Lobelia

Bellflower
Cardinal-flower

Campanula rapunculoides L.
Lobelia cardinalis L.

Scrophulariaceae

Wollkraut
Puttern
Hundsblume
Ehrenpreis

Great Mullein
Moth Waillein
Butter-and-eggs
Culver's-physic

Verbascum thapsus L.
Verbascum blattaria L.
Linaria vulgaris L.
Veronica virginica L.

Compositae

Blauberg-thee
Rheinblume
Olantswurz
Bitterstengel
Erdapfel
Bubelause
Maedlause
Wilde Kamille
Schaffrippen
Kuhbitters
Alter Mann
Alte Frau
Wermuth
Pissbett
Klapperschlangen Wurzel

Sweet golden-rod
Pearly everlasting
Elecampane
Roman-wormwood
Jerusalem artichoke
Com. Beggar-ticks
Spanish needles
May-weed
Com. Yarrow
Com. Tansy
Southernwood
Com. Mugwort
Wormwood
Dandelion
Lion's-foot

Salidago odora L.
Anaphalis margaritacea (L.) B. & H.
Inula helenium L.
Ambrosia artemisiaefolia L.
Helianthus tuberosus L.
Bidens frondosa L.
Bidens Bipinnata L.
Anthemis cotula L.
Achillea millefolium L.
Tanacetum vulgare L.
Artemisia abrotanum L.
Artemisia vulgaris L.
Artemisia absinthium L.
Taraxacum taraxacum (L.) (Karst.)
Nabalus serpentaria (Pursh.) Hook

Pennsylvania-German Names of Trees

By C. D. Mell, Assistant Dendrologist, U. S. Forest Service

The study of the Pennsylvania-German names of trees is very interesting, especially since a number of these vernacular names are so different from those of the original high German that it is often difficult to recognize them as being derived from the latter. A great many of the original settlers of eastern Pennsylvania came from the country districts in southwestern Germany, bringing with them popular names for trees and other useful plants, which they gave to closely related forms found growing in America. Many of these names have survived till today. The word **Kesten**, which is a variant name for **Kastania**, the original high German word, being derived from the name of the territory of Castanea, in Thessaly, is an example of an introduced name. **Grum Beeren**, derived from **Grund Beeren**, is a word in common use in southwestern Germany for Kartoffeln (potatoes), which, although not a tree, serves to illustrate the use of names in vogue in the fatherland. The English element that is scattered throughout the German speaking districts in Pennsylvania has also left its imprint upon plant names, as is shown in words like **Shaelbark**, the first part of which is distinctly German, meaning "to peel off," and the second name is English. Combinations of this kind are not infrequent.

Of course there are still a number of trees and shrubs growing in this part of the state for which no vernacular names exist, while a great many others are given a general term. The different oaks, for instance, are seldom distinguished beyond the two kinds, namely, the white (**weiss Oeche**) and black (**swartz Oeche**). The high German name for oak is **Eiche** of which **Oeche** is a corruption. The white oak, swamp white oak, post oak, and dwarf chinquapin oak are all classed under the general name **weiss Oeche**. Red oak, scarlet oak, yellow oak, pin oak, and black jack are all known as **swartz Oeche**. The most noted exceptions are the chestnut oak (**Quercus prinus** Linn.), which is called **kest Oeche**, and red oak (**Quercus rubra** Linn.), which is sometimes called **roth Oeche**, but the latter is also used occasionally to designate the group of oaks above classed under **swartz Oeche**.

A short list of Pennsylvania-German names is given below:

Penna.-German Name	English Common Name	Botanical Name
Juglandaceae		
Oel Walnuss	Butternut	<i>Juglans cinerea</i> Linn.
Walnuss	Black walnut	<i>Juglans nigra</i> Linn.
Saeu Hickernuss	Pignut	<i>Hicoria glabra</i> (Mill.) Brit.
Weiser Hickernuss	Mockernut	<i>Hicoria alba</i> (Linn.) Brit.
Shaelbark	Shellbark	<i>Hicoria ovata</i> (Mill.) Brit.

The popular name of the shag bark is drawn from the striking appearance of its outer bark, which peels off in long narrow strips.

Salicaceae		
Weide	Willow	<i>Salix nigra</i> Marsh
Trauer Weide	Weeping willow	<i>Salix babylonica</i> Linn.

Aside from the weeping willow, which is an introduced species, the Pennsylvania-Germans recognize only one kind. There are about eight or ten species native to eastern Pennsylvania, but they are not distinguished and are simply called **Weide**, or occasionally **wasser Weide** or **Bruch-Weide**. The latter is the high German name for crack willow, *Salix fragilis* Linn., and should not be used as a general term.

Salicaceae (Continued)

Bopple	Lombardy	<i>Populus nigra italica</i> Du Roi.
Weiser Bopple	European white poplar	<i>Populus alba</i> Linn.
Aspen	Quaking aspen	<i>Populus tremuloides</i> Mich.
Grosse Bopple	Large-toothed aspen	<i>Populus grandidentata</i> Mich.

Betulaceae

Suess Birch	Sweet birch	<i>Betula lenta</i> Linn.
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The German and English names for this tree are so nearly alike that it did not take long for the Pennsylvania-German to drop the hard sound of **k** in the German name **Birke** in favor of the soft sound, **ch** in the English name birch. The Teutonic name for this tree was **Berka**, whence it is easy to see how **Birke** and **Birch** came to be used later. The kind generally found along streams or in wet locations is called wasser Birch (*Betula nigra* Linn.) Other species are seldom distinguished.

Airle	European alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (Linn.) Gaertn.
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Fagaceae

Buche	Beech	<i>Fagus atropunicea</i> (Marsh.) Sudworth.
Kesten	Chestnut	<i>Castanea dentata</i> (Marsh.) Borkh.
Weiss Oeche	White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i> Linn.
Swartz Oeche	Yellow oak	<i>Quercus velutina</i> Lam.
Roth Oeche	Red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i> Linn.
Kest Oeche	Chestnut oak	<i>Quercus prinus</i> Linn.

Ulmaceae

Ulm	American elm	<i>Ulmus americana</i> Linn.
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The word **Ulm** is the high German name for the European elm (*Ulmus campestris* Linn.), and is now generally applied to the American elm (*Ulmus americana* Linn.). **Roosche** is a name occasionally given to this tree in sections of Pennsylvania where the English speaking element has not yet replaced a great many of the German names formerly in use. It is derived from the middle high German **Ruester**. (not Ruestar), and is used as a general term for all species of elms.

Schluepfrige Al	Slippery elm	<i>Ulmus pubescens</i> Walt.
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The name **Al** is derived from European base meaning to grow or to nourish. The inner bark of this species has a very agreeable taste and aromatic odor when dry. Children frequently gather the bark and chew it, and it also has long played an important part in medicine, and among the Pennsylvania German people at the present day old apothecaries still attribute to it its ancient repute.

Moraceae

Weise Maul Beeren	White mulberry	<i>Morus rubra</i> Linn.
Swartze Maul Beeren	Red mulberry	<i>Toxylon pomiferum</i> Raf.
Hedge Baum or		
Wilde orange Baum	Osage orange	<i>Morus alba</i> Linn.

Magnoliaceae

Tulpen or Popple	Yellow poplar	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i> Linn.
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Lauraceae

Sassafras	Sassafras	<i>Sassafras sassafras</i> (Linn.) Karst.
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On account of the aromatic odor of this tree it was supposed by the early German settlers to possess a great many medicinal virtues. It is said that the

women employed the berries of sassafras trees against pain by washing the aching parts with a solution obtained by boiling the berries in water. The bark of this tree was formerly used by the women in dying worsted a fine lasting orange color which is said not to have faded in the sun. The early settlers also gathered the flowers which were carefully dried in the shade to serve as a substitute for tea.

Hamamelidaceae

Suess Gumme	Sweet gum	Liquidambar styraciflua Linn.
Wasser Beech	Sycamore	Platanus occidentalis Linn.

This tree has a very confusing list of Pennsylvania-German names. The wood of sycamore has a rather close resemblance to that of beech, and since the tree is generally found along streams it is often called **wasser Beech**. The German, however, corrupted the word to **wasser Pitsch**, and from this it was still further misnamed until today it is frequently called **wasser Pitcher**. The German ear is not very keen in detecting clearly certain aspirants, as for instance the **b** and **p** or **d** and **t**, and it is therefore easy to see how the word became corrupted from **beech** to **Pitch** and later to **Pitcher**. The term **wasser Pitcher** has a local usage and is not likely to find favor even among the most careless users of Pennsylvania-German plant names. It is also occasionally referred to as **bolle Baum** or **knoep Baum**, but these also are only local names.

Leguminosae

Locus	Locust	Robinia pseudacacia Linn.
Honig Locus	Honey Locust	Gleditsia triacanthos

Aceraceae

Ahorn	Red maple	Acer rubrum Linn.
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The red maple is one of the most common native species of eastern Pennsylvania, and it is seldom that any other name except **maple** is given to this tree. Occasionally one hears the word **rother** or **feld Ahorn**. The silver maple so generally cultivated is sometimes called **spitz-blaettriger Ahorn**.

Hippocastanaceae

Gaeuls Kesten	Horse chestnut	Aesculus hippocastanum Linn.
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Tiliaceae

Linde	Linden	Tilia americana Linn.
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Cornaceae

Hundsholz	Dogwood	Cornus florida Linn.
Gumme Baum	Black gum	Nyssa sylvatica Marsh.

Ebenaceae

Sparveln	Persimmon	Diospyros virginiana Linn.
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The generic name of this tree is derived from **dios**, divine, and **pyros**, pear; resemblance of the fruit. The high German name for this tree is **Dattelpflaume**, a term which does not seem to have come into use in this country. **Dattel** is the German word for **date**, and **pflaume** for **plum**.

Oleaceae

Aesche	American ash	Fraxinus americana Linn.
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The popular high German name is usually written **Esche**, derived from the original Teutonic word **Ask-oz**. The Pennsylvania Germans have not as yet generally distinguished the several species of ashes native to eastern Pennsylvania, except that the ordinary white ash (**Fraxinus americana** Linn.) is occasionally referred to as **weiser Aesche** in order to distinguish it from the **wasser Aesche**, which is the black ash (**Fraxinus nigra** Marsh.), a species generally found in low swampy situations.

Caprifoliaceae

Swartzer Huller	Black elder	Sambucus canadensis Linn.
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The common elder (**Sambucus racemosa** Linn.) native to central and southern Europe is called **Hohlunder** in German. When the early German settlers came to America they found black elder, which they straightway called **swartzer Hohlunder**, which was soon corrupted to **swartzer Huller**.

Schaaf Beeren

Sheep berries

Viburnum lentago Linn.



